DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 827 EA 023 277

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TITLE Does the Doctorate Make a Difference?
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration (Fargo, ND, August 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Qualifications; *Doctoral Degrees; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Instructional Leadership; Leadership Styles; *Professional Development

ABSTRACT

A study explored the differences between educational administrators with or without a doctorate degree. Members of a seminar for beginning practicing administrators interviewed 19 pairs of educational administrators in equivalent positions--one with a doctorate and one without. Utilizing Leithwood's "principal effectiveness" taxonomy, significant differences were found between the levels of administrator development, particularly in the areas of accomplishments, community participation, and sources of information utilized. Doctorate holders tended to hold a more theoretical perspective and to promote racial and/or gender equality and multicultural awareness. Although the findings fail to prove that the doctorate makes a better instructional leader, they suggest that doctorate holders have a broader perspective and are more likely to engage in instructional leadership behaviors than those without the degree. (10 references) (LMI)

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Does the Doctorate Make a Difference?

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A Paper Presented At The
National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration
At Fargo, North Dakota, August 1991

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Within this exploratory study, evidence has been presented which suggests that typically there is an important difference between administrators with and without the doctorate. Members in a seminar for beginning practicing administrators interviewed pairs of school administrators--one with the doctorate and one without. Each pair was chosen so as to match an administrator with a doctorate with another administrator in an equivalent position. Seminar participants agreed that those possessing the doctorate take a more theoretical and broader perspective, often seeing themselves as evaluators and problem solvers. Later analysis of the interviews revealed that those who don't have the degree believe they are just as good instructional leaders as those that do. However, utilizing Leithwood's "principal effectiveness" taxonomy to rate the responses, there was a significant difference in the level of administrator development. This difference was particularly apparent when comparing the accomplishments, the community participation, and the sources of information utilized by the two groups of administrators. While responses favored the doctorate group in terms of the work they are doing to insure racial and/or gender equality and multi-cultural awareness, much more education is obviously needed in this area. In sum, while this study does not prove that a doctorate makes an educational administrator a better instructional leader, it does provide some evidence to suggest that it is likely that administrators with the doctorate provide a broader perspective and more likely engage in those behaviors associated with a significantly higher quality of instructional leadership than those without the doctoral degree.

Although school districts often prefer to hire administrators with a doctorate--and certainly many administrators want a doctorate--there has been very little research to determine whether or not possessing a doctorate actually represents improved instructional leadership. The development of doctoral programs in educational administration has been based more upon the rising spirit of professionalism within educational administration, than upon cumulative evidence supporting the superior work of those possessing the degree.[1] Thus the May 1989 report of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration titled Improving The Preparation of School Administrators recommended that

> The doctorate in educational administration (Ed.D.) be a prerequisite to national certification and state licensure for full-time administrators who are in charge of a school or school system.[2]

But does possessing a doctorate make a difference? Are those administrators who possess a doctorate better administrators? Are they worth the additional cost?

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Methodology

Coincidentally, during the spring 1991 term I taught a "second tier" educational administration course. Practicing administrators in California are required to complete "second tier" certification during the first five years of holding an administrative position to help them establish "good" habits as they launch their administrative careers. But while there is justification for this "second tier," there is also considerable resistance to this certification requirement, as the reader might expect. Regrettably, many new administrators feel that they will not profit from further formal study of educational administration.

Naturally these initially antagonistic feelings make it difficult to teach a "second tier" course in instructional leadership. However, in this instance, these feelings also motivated these young administrators to channel their energies into this exploratory study. While some were merely curious, more than half of the seminar participants admitted that they were anxious to show that further formal study of educational administration doesn't make any difference. But how could we proceed?

Quickly recognizing that a true experimental design was not practical, we agreed to conduct a series of interviews. We identified administrators within the local geographic region with a doctorate and paired them with others holding similar administrative positions, but without the doctorate. Then, each member of the course agreed to interview one pair of administrators.

After considerable discussion about the nature of instructional leadership, we agreed upon the following common questions:

1. Would you briefly describe your professional career with an emphasis upon educational leadership?

2a. (For the non-doctorate) Have you considered earning a doctorate in educational administration? Do you think doctoral study helps one become a better instructional leader?

2b. (For the doctorate) Do you feel you are a better instructional leader due to your doctoral study? Please explain.

3. How do you view yourself as an educational leader?

4. Would you share some recent examples of your leadership?

5. What do you envision for this school/district?

6. What is your involvement in the community?

7. What are you doing to insure racial and/or gender equality and multi-cultural awareness?

Further, since the administrators in the course knew and frequently worked with the interviewees, maintaining the integrity of everyone involved was very important. Hence seminar participants insisted upon initially telling those being interviewed the purpose of the study.

Finally the administrators in the instructional leadership course agreed to orally share the results of the interviews with each other, as well as write a detailed summary of each interview. Sharing them orally allowed us to compose a brief, tentative consensus summary, together, which I could then elaborate, based upon a closer analysis of the written interview reports after the course was formally completed.

Instructional Leadership

As already stated, before the practicing administrators in this instructional leadership course actually conducted the interviews, we reviewed numerous ideas and theories about instructional leadership. For example, Ted Sizer says that leaders "have to see the larger picture, not only in a philosophic sense, but socially, culturally, and economically. Leaders I particularly respect are very well read and are very observant and sophisticated about the larger scene. They are not perceived, therefore, simply as wise mechanics."[3]

Kenneth Leithwood has developed a "principal effectiveness" taxonomy which describes the decision making processes, goals, factors, and strategies utilized by four different levels of principals. The "(low) administration" (1) level principal uses primarily autocratic forms of decision making oriented toward smooth school administration based on personal sources of information. The "humanitarian" (2) level principal uses primarily participatory forms of decision making based on a strong motivation to involve staff so they will be happy. The "program manager" (3) level principal utilizes a limited number of established well-tested decision making strategies, selecting a strategy based upon the urgency and desire to involve staff, and orients the decision process selected toward the school's program, based on information from personal and professional sources. The "(high) systematic problem solver" (4) level principal is skilled in the use of multiple decision making forms, and matches the form to the setting, utilizing information from personal, professional, and research sources. The systematic problem solver principal works toward high levels of participation and is highly ambitious for all students.[4]

Hallinger and McCary report that successful principals can be differentiated from their less effective colleagues by the thinking that guides their behavior as instructional leaders. They say that successful principals evidence more higher-order thinking, a clearer conception of the relationship between important features of the organizational system and their own role in purposefully moving the school towards a set of goals.[5]

Of course, we also reviewed many of the well known "effectiveness" lists, including the National Association of Secondary School Principals "assessment center" skill dimensions, the Nevada School Administrator "instructional leadership traits," Henry Mintzberg's "eight prime leadership skills," Del Stover's "key traits of super principals," Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus' "ten common characteristics of effective leaders," the Illinois Administrators' Academy list, John Gardner's list, the California and Florida principal competencies, the Kent State University "instructional leadership profile," and the Louisiana State University "valued principal leadership characteristics."[6]

But we recognized (with Roland Barth) that judging instructional leadership is not a simple matter of choosing outside criteria or someone's list.[7] After all, William Torbert has persuasively argued that the appropriateness of a managerial style depends upon the stage of development of the organization.[8] Similarly, many years ago Morphet and Schutz showed that different types of districts require different types of administrators.[9] Hence it was my hope that by the time seminar participants conducted the interviews, that they would have broadened their concept of instructional leadership and learned to become "systematic problem solvers" (in terms of Leithwood's taxonomy), themselves.

Seminar Participant Consensus Summary Based Upon the Oral Reports

The seminar participant consensus summary of the oral reports delivered by seminar participants describing individual interviews indicated that non-doctorate administrators typically emphasize that they are "doers." They have achieved their positions having built upon interpersonal professional relationships, working up within the system, taking a managerial perspective (often facilitating the work of others, but also setting a "hard worker" example), and following "concrete" learning and leadership styles.

In contrast, seminar participants reported that administrators possessing the doctorate take a more theoretical perspective. Their perspective seems broader in terms of the larger frames of reference they utilize. They often see themselves as evaluators and problem solvers, focused upon a vision of their school or school district.

With agreement on this summary by the practicing administrators in the course who had each interviewed a pair of administrators--one without a doctorate and one with a doctorate--I proceeded to analyze the written summaries of the interviews in more detail.

Analysis of the Interviews

Nineteen pairs of administrators were interviewed. However, three pairs of interviews for technical reasons were not further useable for the purposes of this study, leaving sixteen pairs for further analysis.[10]

Does doctoral study result in better instructional leadership?

I started my analysis by examining how the administrators interviewed felt about the value of a doctorate.

Non-doctorates were asked whether doctoral study resulted in better instructional leadership. Only three of the sixteen non-doctorate respondents felt that a doctorate would help them become better instructional leaders, whereas twelve of the sixteen respondents felt that it would not, with nine of those, strongly expressing the opinion that it would not. The following five comments were typical of those latter responses:

> No. . . experience and keeping up with the times makes you a better leader.
>
> . . . the cost is too exorbitant for a piece of paper status symbol.
>
> . . . I would rather take focused seminars on specific issues rather than a degree program.
>
> I don't think it would benefit me that much.
>
> No! Neither a doctoral degree nor any degree for that matter makes one a better leader or person. . .

The remaining response was a "maybe."

Among the sixteen respondent administrators with a doctorate, two (from less well known non-research oriented universities) didn't think it helped them become better instructional leaders; one said "possibly" with many qualifications; and the rest strongly felt that it did help them. Typical of the responses were the following comments:

> The doctoral program provides a good mix of the theoretical and practical sides of education. . . It gives you a more global perspective. . .

> The doctorate made me aware of what was available to be examined and learned. Leadership comes from sharing of data, motivating others to get involved, being creative and inventive to overcome the problems and eventually bringing about some positive change, regardless of how broad or focused the task may be.
>
> Yes, it has given me a varied and broad background. . .
>
> I am a better educational leader due to my doctoral study. I feel that I have a huge resource of philosophy, educational theory, and practical applications because of my education.
>
> Yes, for several reasons: it enabled serious involvement in research; it developed skills in analysis and ability to be critical in terms of reviewing research literature; it provided an opportunity to meet and work with other self-motivated, self-actualizing people; it developed my ability to work under stress; and it developed lasting professional friendships.
>
> I think a Ph.D. contributes to what you are. . . The rigorous standards in the Ph.D. program is what separates it from other programs. It is theoretical but beneficial while others are practical. It is idealistic to get the Ph.D. . . . The rigorous criticism you get is good.
>
> Yes! The doctoral program puts you through the paces, requiring much more of you than you thought you could ever deliver. . . . There are also those three little letters after your name that command respect from most . . . but not because of the title, because of the requirements that are demanded.

Hence, there was considerable difference in the expressed perceptions regarding the doctoral degree between those who have one and those that don't. The general feeling among administrators in this sample who didn't have the degree was one of skepticism and disdain toward doctoral programs. On the other hand, there was substantial support for the doctorate among those who have the degree.

<u>Do the accomplishments of non-doctorate and doctorate administrators differ</u>?

Assuming that past accomplishment is the surest predictor of future accomplishment, I was particularly interested in the nature of the reported accomplishments of the administrators in this exploratory study.

Generally, non-doctorate administrators provided examples of their instructional leadership which indicated that they were often working to get the organization running smoother or following through on someone else's leadership initiative. For example, they said, (I . . .)

> Reduced the number of grievances filed over the past few years (from 39 to 23 to 7 to 3).
>
> Informed the community about the start of year-round programs.
>
> Arranged a school-wide career day.
>
> Answered teachers' questions, especially in regards to classroom management and discipline, and wrote the PE component of the school plan.
>
> Smoothly implemented a state required school improvement project after initial staff resistance.
>
> Provided the board with correct information so they can make decisions.
>
> Worked as a "mediator" to resolve principal/parent conflicts.
>
> Raised academic standards; stressed accreditation; increased the number of honors classes; and established a modern computer lab.
>
> Assisted a number of administrators in curriculum alignment within the district.
>
> Met with teachers and principals and reviewed the [state] frameworks, curriculum guides, and standardized tests and identified mastery levels in reading comprehension. I then focused them on improving student learning in that area.

On the other hand, doctorate administrators provided examples, such as the following, of a higher and sometimes creative level of administrative leadership: (I . . .)

> Led a school self-review process.
>
> Established a school reading lab.
>
> Wrote a school plan, consolidating teacher ideas and feelings into a workable plan of action.
>
> Got staff actively involved in planning for year-round education.

Brought a political situation into a stable situation with emphasis on kids.

Developed a care program for "latch-key" children.

Initiated curriculum based assessment; taught staff to implement program; and will collect data from students within the district in order to produce local norms.

Created an Indian education program, involving students and parents.

Developed a district-wide curriculum, aligned with the state framework.

Successfully developed and evaluated a systematic approach to attendance issues, and updated the district's use of computers for management purposes.

The higher level of leadership described by the doctorate group is obvious from their choice of verbs. The non-doctorates "informed," "arranged," "answered," "implemented," and "assisted;" the doctorates "led," "established," "wrote," and "created."

How does the instructional leadership of each group rate?

Evaluating the perceptions of themselves as educational leaders and their visions for the future, each response was rated in terms of the Leithwood "principal effectiveness taxonomy." As the reader can see from Table #1, using standard statistical assumptions, there was a significant difference beyond the .01 level between the two samples.

Table 1

	Average Level	Standard Deviation
Non-doctorates	1.59	0.69
Doctorates	2.88	0.86

t = 5.61, significant at the .001 level

However, a comparison of the sources of information utilized by the respondents more vividly illustrates how these two groups proceed: Non-doctorates most frequently rely upon personal sources of information, whereas the doctorates also network with other administrators but much more frequently engage in research-in-practice and utilize published educational research.

For example, one non-doctorate administrator said she keeps current as an educational leader by spending a lot of time with district administrators ("they seem to feed me the information"). In comparison the doctorate administrator spoke about his interest in "connecting" the theoretical world with the concrete world of the classroom.

While examining the responses to the questions I was struck by how frequently members of the non-doctorate group expressed confidence that they were keeping current in the field of educational administration or participating in the community, when in fact, when pressed for details, few were forthcoming. For example, as one practicing administrator in my course wrote,

> Both claimed to keep current by reading journals. But the difference manifested itself quickly after that. The doctoral intern's depth of keeping current was very apparent. Her description of the journals and how she utilized and analyzed the content was a sign that she internalized the information, understood it, and actually implemented a lot of what she read.[11]

Next, I looked at the relative extent to which these administrators said they participated in their communities.

Community Participation:

Many members in the Instructional Leadership course anticipated that the "ivory tower" mythology would accurately predict that those administrators with a doctorate would hold themselves aloof from their communities, and not as actively participate in their communities as those without the doctorate. However, within this sample, quite the opposite was the case. In fact, since the difference between the myth and our findings was so striking, here are seven comparisons from pairs within the sample which illustrate what we found:

One non-doctorate said his participation was limited to activities that were assigned to him, whereas the doctorate said she and her husband give a yearly scholarship to a needy high school graduate and participate in Sierra Club projects.

Another non-doctorate spoke about his involvement in the community, saying, "I live and work here--that's enough; I'm active." The doctorate said he maintains memberships in the Optimist Club, the Elks, and a local church.

Another non-doctorate claimed that she speaks at "many" community functions but didn't mention any specific functions; the doctorate said she has been a "lead reviewer" for Program Quality Reviews, a "soccer mother," an assistant baseball coach, editor of a newspaper for her child's school, and is on the board of directors of several service clubs and community organizations.

Another non-doctorate said his involvement in the community is limited to his participation at board meetings; while the doctorate said his involvement in the community includes membership in the Lions Club and active involvement in the Chamber of Commerce.

Still another non-doctorate said he leads parenting workshops and "works closely with principals and parents to diffuse explosive situations" and believes in community involvement, but is not actively involved in the community "at this time," whereas the doctorate is a member of the 4-H and youth development board.

Another non-doctorate explained that being new to the community, he was not yet involved, whereas the doctorate said he "finds it important to be visible at ball games, dances, plays, concerts, and church."

Still pertaining to involvement within the community, it was interesting to compare two female directors of curriculum and instruction: The non-doctorate said she had been training two new assistant principals to become principals, and working on curriculum alignment within the district. She said she plans to speak at the Chamber of Commerce, but is not otherwise presently involved in the community. In contrast, the doctorate said she is actively working on staff development, prioritizing needs to fit the budget, and has just completed a district wide curriculum plan aligned with the state frameworks. She is on the Board of the American Cancer Society, and belongs to the [local] Rotary and Toastmasters.

Hence contrary to the "ivory tower" mythology, we found much more involvement on the part of the doctoral group than within the non-doctorate administrators.

Working for Racial and Gender Equality and Multi-cultural Awareness:

While we found that the doctorate group does more to insure racial and/or gender equality and multi-cultural awareness, the difference between the two groups was by no means so clear. On the positive side, there was no apparent difference between the two administrators in three of the pairs, in that both said they were working for and supporting the need to insure racial and/or gender equality and multi-cultural awareness. However, in one of the sixteen pairs, both administrators seemed sadly lacking in the need to promote multi-cultural awareness.

On the other hand, in two other pairs, the non-doctorate seemed much more active and knowledgeable in this area. For example, in one of these two pairs, the non-doctorate had learned Spanish fluently, whereas the doctorate answered the question "What are you doing to insure racial and/or gender equality and multi-cultural awareness?" by saying "As an administrator, I try to let the 'punishment fit the crime' in all discipline cases"!

But in the majority of the comparisons, whereas the non-doctorate expressed some small degree of support for racial and gender equality and multi-cultural awareness, the doctorate spoke directly to specific accomplishments or strategies which he or she was pursuing, or clearly saw the issues in much broader terms.

For example, in one pair, the non-doctorate administrator saw multi-cultural awareness in terms of special "programs to recognize different cultures," whereas the administrator with the doctorate spoke about multi-cultural issues permeating the entire school program.

In another pair, when asked about her involvement in promoting equity and multi-cultural understanding, the non-doctorate spoke about her work identifying students "at risk" who were "often . . . students in racial or ethnic minorities that don't fit." The doctorate, on the other hand, had organized the District Multi-cultural Committee, which coordinates a supply of guest speakers, and developed a district calendar of activities.

In still another pair, whereas the non-doctorate "recognized" that the district's philosophy is equity for all students, the doctorate had developed a multi-cultural program that has been presented at a state administrator's conference.

In another pair, the non-doctorate said that he is "more of a defender of equality rather than a booster," whereas the doctorate spoke of developing an "Indian Education Program" in celebration of diversity before this question was even asked.

In still another "telling" response-pair, the non-doctorate spoke about trying to hire "as many bilingual assistants as possible," whereas the doctorate spoke about his vision of a "global world" with a multi-cultural perspective, again, before this specific question was even asked. Notice that the non-doctorate was not talking about faculty and administrators, but hiring "bilingual assistants."

A Closing Thought

There is a story about Lee Iaccoca's troubled reaction upon walking out into the parking lot at Chrysler and finding that very few of his employees were driving Chryslers.

I too find it troubling that so many educational administrators without the doctorate seem to have so little respect for the doctoral degree. Who will teach students to value a well-developed course over narrowly conceived workshop training if not school educational leaders? Who will teach students to value the well-roundedness and comprehensiveness of a degree program over taking specific courses if not educational leaders? We must have educational leaders in the schools that understand the foundations of education and love learning.

Footnotes

1. According to the California State Postsecondary Education Commission,

> The doctorate in education emerged as an autonomous degree program during the early years of the twentieth century. While individual professorships in education or "pedagogy" had been established in a few universities before 1900--The University of Iowa in 1873, the University of Michigan in 1879, and Harvard in 1891--no separate departments of education existed. And while dissertations dealing with topics in educational history, theory, and even practice had been written before 1900, degrees were issued by departments of philosophy, history, or psychology.
>
> The merger of Teachers College with Columbia University in 1898 seemed to set in motion the establishment of departments and schools of education in universities throughout the country. By the early 1920s, some 25 institutions were offering doctoral programs in education, and by the early '30s the number had almost doubled (California State Postsecondary Education Commission, The Doctorate in Education: Issues of Supply and Demand in California. Sacramento: Commission, 1987, p. 10.)

2. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, Improving The Preparation of School Administrators. Charlottesville, Virginia: The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989, p. 6.

3. Sparks, Dennis, "A 'Friendly Conversation' with Ted Sizer," Journal of Staff Development, Winter, 1991, p. 45.

4. Leithwood, Kenneth, "The Principal Effectiveness Taxonomy," Educational Leadership, September 1987, p. 66.

5. Hallinger, Philip and McCary, C.E., "Using a Problem-Based Approach for Instructional Leadership Development," Journal of Staff Development, Spring 1991, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 6-12.

6. Henry Mintzberg's "eight prime leadership skills" are listed in Bennis, Warren, Why Leaders Can't Lead. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc., 1989, p. 159. Del Stover's "key traits of super principals is described in the September 1989 issue of The Executive Educator, p. 26. Bennis and Nanus' "ten common characteristics of effective leaders" were found in Bennis, Warren and Nanus, Burt, Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge. New York: Harper & Row, 1985. John Gardner cautions the reader not to interpret his list too literally. See Gardner, John, On Leadership. New York: The Free Press, 1990, p. 48-.

7. Barth, Roland, Improving Schools From Within. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1991. See pages 37-40.

8. Tobert, William, Managing the Corporate Dream: Restructuring for Long-Term Success. Homewood, Illinois: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1987.

9. Schutz, W., Procedures for Identifying Persons With Potential for Public School Administrative Positions. Berkeley: University of California, 1961.

10. The written report on Pair #1 was not useable because the comparison was between a public school administrator without a doctorate with a junior college administrator with a doctorate. The reports on Pairs #6 and #19 were not useable because the administrators were not asked the agreed upon standard set of questions. However, the substance of these three reports closely agree with the synthesis of the oral reports.

11. I am reminded of my own education in the field of music. As a teenager, having achieved some local success, I had an inflated view of my abilities. Then upon studying one summer at Aspen with nationally recognized musicians, I attained a much more realistic view of my few accomplishments. A whole new "world of music" opened up to me of which I was unaware.

Similarly Professors Don Coleman and Diane Yerkes at Fresno State University recently found that beginning educational administration students recognized that they knew less about educational administration, after having taken their first course in the subject, than they perceived they knew at the start. (Coleman, Don and Yerkes, Diane, "After One Course: Study of Changes In Perceived Competence Held By Teachers Beginning A Graduate Program In Educational Administration," The Journal of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration. Bakersfield: California State University, Bakersfield, 1991, pp. 3-22.